A Father Always Knows: The Misadventures of Ted Wheeler by DBSean

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Genre: Comedy, Embarrassment, F/M, Fatherhood, Misunderstandings, Oblivious, Parent-Child Relationship, Teen Romance
Language: English
Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Karen Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Ted Wheeler
Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Mike Wheeler & Ted Wheeler
Status: Completed
Published: 2018-01-14
Updated: 2018-01-14
Packaged: 2022-04-20 16:21:40
Rating: General Audiences
Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply
Chapters: 1
Words: 1,748
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

“Oh, honestly, Ted! I love you, but you can be so oblivious!”

Ted Wheeler decides to pay closer attention to his son and this girlfriend of his...with comedic results.

A Father Always Knows: The Misadventures of Ted Wheeler

Author's Note:

> A/N: I do believe this may be the very first Ted-centric story on this site. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure I don't deserve to win a prize either way.
>
> Post-Season 2.

"Does Mike's friend Jane look familiar to you at all?"

It was a usually busy Friday evening at the Wheeler household. Mike's friends were down in the basement, already causing a commotion, evidently about to begin one of their infamous Dungeons & Dragons campaigns. Will and Dustin had been the first to arrive, both dropped off by Will's brother Jonathan, and they were shortly followed by Lucas and Max, the two having been completing homework together at the Sinclair residence prior to arrival. But it was the child who had been last to arrive that Karen was referring to.

Jane Hopper (whom Mike and his friends insisted on calling 'El' for some unfathomable reason) was the newest addition to their rambunctious little group, and a controversial one at that. The illegitimate daughter of their own Chief Jim Hopper, if the rumors were to be believed, she had seemingly appeared from out of thin air at the beginning of the current school year, only to be instantly adopted by Mike and his friends. Hopper himself had dropped her off only ten minutes before, and Ted remembered how Mike had practically pole-vaulted to the front door in order to be the one to answer it.

"Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler!" was all the girl had time to say before Mike took her hand in his and led her past them and down in the basement with the rest of the party.

Ted had barely registered her presence at the time, the newspaper having commanded all of his attention, but evidently his wife had

taken notice.

“Familiar in what way?” Ted asked absentmindedly, finishing the Sports section and moving on to the Weather, his personal favorite.

“I don’t know,” Karen admitted, biting her lip and frowning slightly. She had been reading one of her romance novels on the couch beside Ted, but now seemed lost in thought. “I just have this incredible feeling of déjà vu, as though I’ve seen her face before. Perhaps a photograph?”

“You’re probably just imagining it,” Ted reassured her, once again hooked by this week’s upcoming forecast. “Which one was Jane, again?”

“Oh, honestly, Ted! I love you, but you can be so oblivious!”

Ted frowned and looked up. “I beg your pardon, Karen?”

“You heard me,” Karen said with a huff, going back to her book. “You’re a good man, Ted, but you’re oblivious. You always have been. Mike is growing up so fast, and you don’t even seem to notice! It’s about time you took an interest in your son!”

Ted couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Him? Oblivious? He’d been called many things in his life – boring, plain, unexciting, nondescript, inattentive, mouthbreather – but oblivious was most certainly not one of them. Whatever could she possibly mean? Just because he forgot the name of one of Mike’s friends, he was oblivious? That hardly seemed fair!

“Very well, Karen,” Ted finally said, folding his newspaper and making to get up, “perhaps it is time I took a bigger interest in our son. I’ll start right away.”

And start right away, he did.

Over the course of the following days and weeks, Ted Wheeler kept a closer eye on his son.

He watched as Mike attended his very first high school dance (Homecoming), having spent the evening fiddling endlessly over his tie and corsage and hair, making sure everything was absolutely perfect for what Ted believed was a special someone, despite the fact he was supposedly going with his friends as a group.

He watched as Mike sneaked out of his room night after night, only to come home long after he incorrectly believed his father had fallen asleep in his La-Z-Boy (and several times when Ted actually had fallen asleep, but was awakened by Mike's less-than-subtle movements.

He watched as Mike spent hours upon hours on the phone, talking with a kindness and a gentleness he wasn't aware the boy possessed.

He watched as Mike spoke to his sister more and more, asking for advice on topics he seemed embarrassed to bring up with his mother or father.

He watched as Mike spent his weekends mowing lawns and doing odd-jobs around the neighborhood in order to make enough money to buy a present for someone whose name he refused to mention.

He watched as Mike raced to the door to answer it whenever Chief Hopper stopped by to drop off Jane and Max for their weekly tutoring sessions.

He watched as Mike's face turned red whenever Jane took his hand in hers, or leaned in to whisper something in his ear.

And slowly – slowly – Ted Wheeler began to understand.

"Michael? Can I talk to you for a minute, son?"

Mike looked up from his desk to find his father standing in the bedroom doorway, a single eyebrow cocked expectantly as he waited for a response. Mike was just in the process of finishing his math homework, and it took his brain a moment to shift from School Mode to Dealing with Dad Mode.

“Uh, yeah, sure,” he finally stammered, blinking a little in surprise. When was the last time his father had actually initiated a conversation with him? Second…maybe third grade? “What’s up?”

Ted smiled. “Come here, son. I have something for you.”

“Okay?”

Mike stood and, just as confused as he was a moment ago, obediently followed his father into his parents’ bedroom. His mother was downstairs playing with Holly, and Nancy was out for the night, leaving only Mike and his father in the large bedroom.

“Take a seat,” Ted said, nodding towards the bed. Mike did so, and Ted took post in front of his dresser, crossing his arms as he looked down at his son’s very confused face.

“You, uh…said you had something for me?” Mike asked.

“I do,” Ted said gently. He took a breath before he began. “You know, your mother thinks I don’t pay enough attention to you. Says I’m oblivious.”

Mike did his best to look shocked. “Oh. That so?”

“I know, preposterous, right?” Ted said with a nod, glad he and his son were on the same page. “But, to be fair, she may have had a point. You may not have noticed, son, but I’ve been watching you. And I think I’ve figured a couple things out.”

“Like…what?”

Ted cocked an eyebrow and smiled lightly, leaning in somewhat for what he hoped to be dramatic effect. “Am I right in assuming you’ve found yourself a girlfriend?”

Mike’s face immediately flushed a bright red in color, betraying him before he even had a chance to deny it. Ted laughed lightly, holding his hands up as if to say ‘no harm, no foul.’

“Nothing to be embarrassed about, Michael. I was your age once, too, you know. And a father always knows. That’s why I got you this.”

Turning around so he could open the topmost drawer of his dresser, Ted pulled a small red box out from beneath a pile of black and brown socks. Mike frowned in confusion as his father handed it to him.

“Go on,” Ted said, “open it.”

Mike did so, pulling the lid off the box, and Ted smiled as he watched his son’s eyes widen in surprise.

Inside the box was a glorious gold-colored ring just the right size to fit on the ring finger of a teenage girl. The bright red stone at the top of the ring caught the light in just such a way that Mike at first thought it to be of pure ruby. It was perhaps the most beautiful ring Mike had ever seen.

“When I was your age, we used to give girls rings or necklaces when we asked them to ‘go steady’ with us,” Ted told his son as Mike looked up in confusion, wondering what in the world his father was doing offering him a ring. “I don’t know if you kids still do that – seems good, traditional American values aren’t what they used to be – but I thought it might be nice. If she’s into that kind of thing.”

Mike was stunned. His father knew he had a girlfriend? His father was giving him a gift, no strings attached? His father not only supported an aspect of Mike’s life, but was actively encouraging it?

This wasn’t like the Ted Wheeler he knew. This wasn’t like the Ted Wheeler he knew at all.

“Thanks, Dad,” he finally stammered, his surprise evidence in his voice. A small smile began to overtake his face. “This is…this is really nice. I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything,” Ted reassured his son. “Just know that your old man sees more than he lets on. Not so oblivious after all, huh? I even made sure the stone was the same color as her hair, so it matches.”

Mike froze. Somewhere, a record scratched.

‘Wait a minute…’

The stone on the ring was red. El's hair was not red; it was brown. In fact, the only girl Mike knew who did have hair the same color as the stone was –

"Wait…MAX?" Mike practically shouted, his voice cracking halfway through. "You think Max is my – "

"Uh-uh-uh!" Ted interrupted immediately, sternly holding up a single finger to ward off his son's sudden protests. "Not another word, son. You don't have to explain yourself to me."

"No, but, Dad – !"

"A father always knows, Michael," Ted said simply, turning towards the doorway with a sense of finality about his statement. "A father always knows."

And with that, Ted walked out of his own bedroom, the beginnings of a smile creeping upon the edges of his lips. For the first time in a long time, he felt like he had truly connected with his son. He was proud and, if the look on Mike's face at the end there was anything to go by, he bet his son felt the same way.

'Not so oblivious now, am I, Karen?' he thought to himself as he made his way down the hall and towards the stairs.

Back in the bedroom, Mike spent half a minute dumbly looking back and forth between the ring in his hands and the doorway through which his father had disappeared. The moment passed, and Mike closed his eyes and ran his hand through his messy black hair, a look of utter exasperation upon his face as he spoke for the first time since his father had left.

"…Jesus Christ, Dad…"

Author's Note:

> A/N: Believe it or not, I actually tried writing this as a serious story before I realized it was a) comedy gold, and b) completely in-character for the Ted Wheeler we all know and love.